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TAGS: KCRM ASEC KDEM PHUM SNAR PGOV GT

SUBJECT: POLITICAL MOTIVES RULED OUT IN 52 MURDERS REPORTED  
DURING 2007 ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

REF: A. 07 GUATEMALA 696

1B. 07 GUATEMALA 2013

Classified By: Ambassador James Derham for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (U) The National Civil Police (PNC) and the Public Ministry have ruled out political motives in almost all of the 53 murders of political activists and mayoral pre-candidates reported between March 2006 and October 2007 during the run-up to the first round of national and local elections. According to the two institutions, motives unrelated to the elections were the principal motives for the deaths. Most of the cases, however, remain under investigation and neither the PNC nor the Public Ministry have established definitive hypotheses regarding criminal motives.

12. (U) Among the 53 murders was the March 2006 murder of Congressman Mario Pivaral of the National Unity of Hope (UNE) in front of UNE headquarters in Guatemala City, the December 2006 murder of the Treasurer of the Union Democratica (UD), the September 2007 murder of two political activists affiliated with Encuentro por Guatemala (EG), and the murder of Rodolfo Vielman Castellanos, Legal Advisor to Partido Patriota (PP).

13. (U) One of the most prominent cases was the October 2007 murder of Aura Esperanza Salazar, Secretary of the PP, and Valerio Ramiro Castanon, agent of the Administrative and Security Affairs Secretariat (SAAS). Another case of pre-electoral violence that drew front-page media attention was the September 2007 murder of retired army Colonel Giovanni Pacay who was shot in his private security firm. Pacay was known to be a friend of presidential candidate Otto Perez Molina (ref B).

14. (U) Of the 53 reported murders, only that of Mario Pivaral may have been politically motivated, according to the Public Ministry. In the case of Salazar and Castanon, authorities' preliminary hypothesis is that the murder was driven by personal vengeance against Castanon.

15. (C) Comment: Violent crime is endemic in Guatemala, and it affects all levels of society. There are roughly 14 murders a day in Guatemala, but very few murders are politically motivated. While the preliminary hypotheses of the PNC and Public Ministry suggest no connection between these murders and the 2007 elections, we cannot rule out the possibility that some of the murders were politically motivated.

Derham